



# 11th hour S. Mtn. Freeway deal?

**Kerry Fehr-Snyder**

The Arizona Republic

May. 15, 2007 01:42 PM

A leader of the Maricopa Association of Governments says talks between the state and the Gila River tribe over the alignment of the proposed South Mountain Freeway are underway.

But the tribe says that's an overstatement.

Alia Maisonet, a tribal spokeswoman, said while the tribe and state talk regularly, it is not formally negotiating with the state about the freeway. Nor has it met with MAG or other state and Valley leaders.

"One of Gila River Indian Community's biggest concerns on the South Mountain Freeway on or off the reservation is the environmental impacts that will occur in this part of the valley," she said in an e-mail Tuesday.

"We, too, understand that traffic is an issue, a lot of our Community members live in the city, we feel the effects from the rapid population growth just as much as anyone person in the metropolitan area." Phoenix City Councilwoman Peggy Neely last month had asked the MAG's executive committee to delay asking Gov. Janet Napolitano to intervene in the freeway fight.

"It is my understanding that discussions are taking place on a variety of issues between the State of Arizona and the Gila River Indian Community," Neely wrote in an April 16 e-mail obtained by *The Arizona Republic*.

"Before the MAG Executive Committee formally requests in a letter that the Governor intervene on the location of the South Mountain Freeway, we should be cognizant of deliberations taking place and not have MAG weigh in before we have more facts."

Neely, Phoenix's MAG representative, convinced the committee the same day of her e-mail to postpone sending the letter to Napolitano. Committee members discussed the letter during a scheduled meeting that Neely participated in via a conference call.

The committee is comprised of Neely and the mayors of Mesa, Gilbert, Scottsdale, Surprise, Goodyear and Litchfield Park.

The full MAG council has 32 members who represent every governments in Maricopa County plus representatives of the three Native American communities and members of the state transportation board.

Thomas Remes of the city's Intergovernmental Programs drafted the letter at Neely's request.

Neely was successful in convincing other MAG executive committee members last month to postpone the issue for 30 days. But the committee didn't take up the issue at its meeting Monday, May 14 and discussion of the draft

letter doesn't appear on future MAG executive meetings.

The pace of building the South Mountain Freeway has frustrated some MAG executive committee members.

The MAG executive committee wrote that in a draft letter considered at its April 16 meeting that it is concerned by continuing delays in building the 22-mile freeway to complete the Loop 202 circling the Valley.

"The South Mountain Freeway has been approved twice by the voters - in 1985 as part of Proposition 300 and in 2004 as part of Proposition 400. Since 1985, the South Mountain Freeway has continuously been approved by the MAG Regional Council as part of the MAG Regional Transportation Plan," the letter states.

ADOT chose 55th Avenue as the west-side alignment but has yet to settle on the east-side alignment through Ahwatukee Foothills.

Opponents to the Pecos Road freeway alignment think recent delays in preparing a draft environmental impact statement are due to behind-the-scenes negotiations to get the freeway built on tribal land.

"I think there's been enough hints that there is something going on," said Jim Jochim, an Ahwatukee resident and officer in the grassroots, anti-freeway group, Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children.

"Long-term, the freeway is a very positive economic engine for the GRIC," he said.

Asked whether the tribe would benefit if the freeway were built along Pecos Road, Jochim said, "Only half of it. And it depends on where there's access points."

Interchanges are planned along Pecos Road as it heads west and through the southern tip of the South Mountain Preserve.

Tribal members have said they object to destroying part of the mountain, which they consider sacred.

"I think the South Mountain is more sacred than the land," Jochim said. "In the short term, they're going to reap millions of dollars by putting it on their property."

### What do you think?

Post a comment about this article

• [Click here](#) to post a comment (Quick Click login required; [register now](#) -- it's free)

Current Page: 1 of 3

Goto Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [Next](#)

### Your comments

@Ratioanl9201:

See below. Apologies to greg8102. (Sam1222, May 16, 2007 08:37AM)

---

@greg8102

"I think 1 of 2 things happened. Either Sam1222's brain cramped after writing all of that OR he's still writing a respnse that will take this forum from 3 pages to 197 pages long."

No Greg I have more important things to do than spending my time blogging,,,one of which is going to transportation meetings. There actually are some citizens who try to keep state agencies in check. And if it takes 197 pages to do so...tough.

The average ADOT document length would cause your brain to overload.(Sam1222, May 16, 2007 08:35AM)

---

@greg8102:

I don't own property near the proposed freeway. Also read those New Times articles. They are a good source of public records on ADOTs past practices. There are very few stories written about ADOTs business practices in the past 15 years because ADOT does such a good job of spreading it out all over the country. ADOT is basically a consulting company not a transportation construction or engineering firm.

ADOT & MAG continually bury the facts in hundreds of pages of documents which makes it next to impossible for the general public to get a good handle on what ADOT is really doing with the taxpayer's money. ADOT shuts the public out at every junction they can. When meetings and decisions become controversial, they either hold the meetings in locations that those affected won't travel to or wait till after "the official meeting" to discuss controversial issues. ADOT and MAG work behind closed doors but they go thru all the required motions to show the appearance of an open forum. ADOT and MAG are wasting billions of taxpayer transportation money on unproductive solutions to our CURRENT transportation needs. That doesn't mean go rail instead of freeways, that means use the money where it's most effective at this time.

To all those people who constantly say it's been on the books since the 1980's and those people should have known and not bought houses in the path of a freeway.

Well the majority didn't. The South Mountain Freeway as originally planned in the 1980's is more than half completed. The proposed area thru Ahwatukee is done almost as planned. A three lane divided highway along an area that is now known as Pecos Road. Currently it's a two-lane highway with no homes having to be bought or destroyed. Less than 40 homes would have to be bought to make it 3 lanes.

ADOT changed the rules in the late 1990s and decided to make the South Mountain Freeway a ten-lane freeway. The widest new constructed freeway ADOT has ever built in the metro area. Developers even offered to sell ADOT undeveloped land but ADOT "didn't have the money." ADOT & MAG wouldn't consider investigating the possibility of exempting developers from paying property taxes on undeveloped land in the path of the freeway until a decision on the freeway is made. Mayor Gordon gave away \$100 million of taxpayer's sales tax revenue to a mall developer so we could have a Bloomingdales in North Phoenix.

Building the South Mountain freeway in its current footprint is a colossal waste of our tax dollars that will not solve our serious rush hour traffic problems at the Broadway curve or from 55th avenue to the deck park tunnel on the west side.

On March 30, 2006, Bob Hazlett (MAG Senior Engineer) in a presentation to the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team showed simulations that proved that the South Mountain Freeway would not reduce traffic in the Broadway Curve area by any appreciable amount. He also went on further to state that most truck traffic on I-10 travels from Los Angeles and ports in Long Beach and because truckers are paid by the mile, most won't necessarily use the South Mountain Freeway because I-10 mileage thru downtown is shorter.

The South Mountain Freeway in its current footprint will not help commuters between 75th Avenue and the deck park tunnel. It will in effect increase traffic in this area heading towards downtown on I-10. MAG and the

politicians refuse to fight the City of Tolleson and the car dealers along 99th Avenue because of the costs involved and many of the politicians depend on handouts from these people. Therefore the 55th Avenue choice will make help to make west siders commute even worse in the future.

The South Mountain Freeway will go down in history as the worst waste of taxpayer's transportation money in Arizona history if built in its current path. **(Sam1222, May 16, 2007 08:23AM)**

---

For those who keep complaining about the "whiners" of Ahwatukee, think about when you bought YOUR house (if you even have one). Did you go to the city planning commission and carefully research it to find out every thing that could conceivably affect it 20 years later, or did you rely on the permit process and the developer to tell you the truth about potential nuisances?

I bet for 99% of you it was the latter. So this could have easily happened to you too. You are no better than the "whiners of Ahwatukee".

Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. **(Chris7440, May 16, 2007 07:33AM)**

---

Ralph, as you can tell by the lack of resonse to your email. No one has noticed the improved traffic congestion on the 60, thats because the 60 became congested as sson as the lanes were added.

Why is MAG represented by most mayors in Maricopa County except the Mayor of Phoenix?

Lets get a rail running in the middle of I10 from Ahwatukee to Avondale.  
Just adding more freeways is not the answer to traffic congestion. Cough cough.

**(Agusto3243, May 16, 2007 07:25AM)**

---

Has anyone noticed how much traffic has improved on the 60 freeway since they opened up to five lanes ? This exactly what we need around Ahwatukee on Pecos Road. In fact costs should be less as the prices of homes have decreased ten to twenty per cent over the last one to two years. That will help reduce costs significantly for 250 homes. Those people should sell now before the prices go even lower. Let's quit talking and get building so those of us smart enough to buy outside of the initially proposed route can reap the benefitis. **(Ralph1999, May 15, 2007 09:33PM)**

---

Build it where it has been PLANNED for many many years. Pay the homeowners exactly what they payed and not a penny more... they should not profit from their ignorance or selfishness. After all, they either failed to do basic due deligence or thought they could muscle a change. Either was a mistake. **((Ralph1999, May 15, 2007 09:29PM)**

---

Go to Iraq **(Daniel9213, May 15, 2007 08:06PM)**

---

Greg8102,

I think 1 of 2 things happened. Either Sam1222's brain cramped after writing all of that OR he's still writing a respnse that will take this forum from 3 pages to 197 pages long. **(Ratioan19201, May 15, 2007 07:02PM)**

---

Sam, good argument(s) despite using the NewTimes as a reference. I am curious though, do you own property

near the proposed freeway or do you have an objective perspective?(**Greg8102**, May 15, 2007 06:48PM)

---

Enough of the 'not in my town' BS. The growth has happened, is happening, and WILL happen, so put the freakin freeway in already. 'Sacred land'?? I agree, take a look at the tribe's 'sacred land' that they live on, and see how they treat it. Just see how they take care of it. I don't care what reservation your on, but they all look like a filthy piece of crap trailer park. Do you beg to differ? It's all SACRED until you throw a money making casino on it. Then the Gods are ok with that biz-natch! What a freakin joke. Put in the freeway, the people need some relief to the traffic madness already.(**chris7105**, May 15, 2007 06:36PM)

---

Build it where it has been PLANNED for many many years. Pay the homeowners exactly what they payed and not a penny more... they should not profit from their ignorance or selfishness. After all, they either failed to do basic due deligence or thought they could muscle a change. Either was a mistake.(**Greg8102**, May 15, 2007 06:35PM)

---

Sam, I agree 100%

I've seen several detailed letters to the editor in the Ahw Foothills News stating that the Freeway will cost \$3-4 billion, based on exactly the reasoning you used.

In fact, our US Congressman Harry Mitchell agrees and has quoted the \$3B+ numbers serveral times in the AZ Republic (BTW, Harry believes the current SMF alignment is a boondoggle). This astronomical amount of money will surely help the GRIC's negotiating power.

In summary, I hope this rumor of negotiations between the state and GRIC are true. It's a clear win-win situation for everyone on both sides of Pecos, and the freeway construction would proceed much faster.(**Ron417**, May 15, 2007 05:17PM)

---

All this racist B.S. is getting old. Every subject that has to do with any tribe ends being about the people on the Rez and not the subject at hand. There are some good arguments here but for me they are overshadowed by racist idiots like Jack5985.

I read this stuff and sometimes I laugh and sometimes I get pissed. But the funny thing is that no matter how you people feel you have NO say in what the tribe does with the land. (**Michelle3395**, May 15, 2007 04:54PM)

---

How many people know that Phoenix metro is classified by the EPA as "serious non-attainment" with regard to its particulate air pollution? Until the State or County gets even more serious about mandating California-strict emissions standards (like new generation, diesel-emissions filters that trap particulates), I say "scrap the freeway and to heck with more growth."(**Rodger2924**, May 15, 2007 04:54PM)

---

Current Page:1 of 3

Goto Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [Next](#)